

PRESS RELEASE

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BIKS AND VENTURELLA PLEAD GUILTY TO MAIL FRAUD CHARGE IN FEDERAL COURT

Madison, Wisconsin -- Erik C. Peterson, United States Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin, announced that Victoria Biks, 44, and Marjorie Venturella, 69, both of Radisson, Wisconsin, pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court in Madison to mail fraud.

Both defendants pled guilty to Count one of an indictment that charged them with unlawfully obtaining public benefits from various government agencies by making false statements and material omissions. The agencies involved included the Social Security Administration, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Sawyer County Health and Human Services, and the Sawyer County Circuit Court.

The public benefits involved Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, State Supplemental Security Income benefits, Medicaid benefits, health care benefits from Sawyer County Health and Human Services, and legal guardianship services from the Sawyer County Circuit Court. The total value of the unlawfully obtained public benefits exceeded \$280,600.

At the plea hearing, the defendants admitted that Victoria Bik's son, designated in the indictment by the initials "P.V.," was born on August 22, 1980, in Illinois, and received a settlement of \$1,237,000 on September 30, 1983, as a result of a medical malpractice lawsuit. The defendants admitted that these monies were placed into a trust fund for P.V. and administered by the Cook County Circuit Court. Because of this trust fund, P.V. was not entitled to public benefits, including state and federal SSI. Nonetheless, the defendants applied for and received SSI benefits on behalf of P.V. from 1983 to August 1, 2003, totaling \$100,918.29.

According to the government, the SSI checks were endorsed by Victoria Biks and the money was deposited into Marjorie Venturella's checking account. Venturella then issued a monthly check back to Biks which varied between \$825 to \$1,000. The defendants never informed the Cook County court that they were receiving these benefits on behalf of P.V. Moreover, Biks admitted that she signed and submitted false SSI eligibility forms to the Social Security office in Superior, Wisconsin in 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2003, and falsely indicated that P.V. had zero assets.

Finally, the government presented evidence that in March 2000, the defendants petitioned the Sawyer County Circuit Court to open a guardianship estate for P.V. The defendants never told the Sawyer County court that P.V. already had an estate in Illinois. Also, Biks admitted that she filed false estate accountings with the Sawyer County court in 2001 through 2003, where she reported that P.V. had zero assets.

U.S. District Judge John C. Shabaz scheduled sentencing for October 12, 2007, at 1:15 p.m. Both defendants face a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000

fine. They also face criminal forfeiture of \$114,313.

The charges against Biks and Venturella are the result of an investigation conducted by the Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General, and the Sawyer County Sheriff's Office. Prosecution of this case has been assigned to Assistant U.S. Attorney Dan Graber.

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